

IN THE MATTER OF INTEREST ARBITRATION

BETWEEN)
)
DALLAS COUNTY, IOWA,)
)
) Hugh J. Perry, Arbitrator
PUBLIC EMPLOYER,)
)
AND)
)
) Award issued: June 4, 2002
AFSCME/IOWA COUNCIL 61,)
)
LOCAL 3673-11 (County Attorneys),)
)
)
EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATION.)

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PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT
RELATIONS BOARD

APPEARANCES:

FOR DALLAS COUNTY: FOR AFSCME COUNCIL 61:
Renee Von Bokern, Bargaining Representative Greg Lewis, Bargaining Representative

BACKGROUND

AFSCME Local 3673-11 represents a bargaining unit comprised of Assistant Dallas County Attorneys (3) and Secretaries (4). The parties have bargained since 1995. This year they have resolved all of their contractual differences except for Wages. They have agreed to prescription drug co-pay on their health insurance as follows: Generic-\$10, Name Brand (Formulary)-\$25, and Name Brand (Non-Formulary)-\$40. They have bypassed Facfinding and engage Arbitration complete impasse procedures. They have extended the impasse time lines to allow for completion of the process. A hearing was held at the Dallas County Courthouse in Adel, Iowa on May 21, 2002. Following the presentation of documentary evidence, oral testimony and argument, the hearing was closed on that date. I have considered the provisions of Section 20.22(9) of the PERA in making this award.

IMPASSE ISSUES

The Impasse Issue before the Arbitrator is: Wages for the contract July 1, 2002 to June 30, 2003.

PROPOSALS OF THE PARTIES

COUNTY PROPOSAL: The County proposes that the wages for these employees be increased by 3.5% effective July 1, 2002.

UNION PROPOSAL: The Union proposes that the wages for these employees be increased by 6% effective July 1, 2002.

CURRENT CONTRACT

The current contract provides separate wage schedules for the Clerical Support employees and for the Assistant County Attorneys. The Clerical support schedule starts at \$18,786.15, provides for a six month step of \$19,960.89 and then for 5 annual steps to a maximum salary of \$24,432.62. The steps range from 3-6% and average 4.33%. Also, the Administrative Assistant to the County Attorney receives an additional \$5,222.10 making her current salary \$30,176.82. The wage scale for Assistant County Attorneys starts at \$32,198.82 increases to \$33,020.46 after 6 months and provides for six annual steps to a top salary of \$46,290.91. The steps range from 3-7% and average 5.43%. All current employees will receive a step increase during the next contract with the exception of the Administrative Assistant who has completed the wage schedule. In addition to this compensation, these employees receive longevity pay which starts at \$.10/hour after 5 years and increases by \$.10 per hour for each 5 years of service thereafter to a maximum of \$.60/hour after 30 years.

CONTENTIONS OF THE PARTIES

The **County** proposes a 3.5% wage adjustment for these employees. It notes that other Dallas County employees will have their wages adjusted on July 1, 2002 as follows: Sheriff: 3.5%, Road Office, 3.5%, Courthouse 3-4%. The Secondary Road Unit had tentatively agreed to a 3% wage increase at the time of this Arbitration hearing. The County notes that the wages for the Assistant County Attorneys with its 3.5% adjustment would increase by 10% over the life of the next contract due to scheduled step increases and that all of the secretaries except for the Administrative Assistant would average 6% wage adjustments. The County noted that Social Security benefits will be adjusted by 2.6% to cover the cost of inflation for next year. The County points out that the salaries of the Assistant County Attorneys had increased by 29% or 7.25% per year for the years 1999-2002 and that they had received a mid year adjustment of 10% in 2000 in an effort to bring their salaries into line with comparable counties. The County noted that it was difficult to make comparisons with similar employees in other counties as there are many variables. Although not at issue here, the County pointed out that these employees enjoy an excellent health insurance plan and the amount they are required to pay toward family insurance (20% or \$99.15/month) is less than that required by many other employers. Only two other comparable counties require less. While some other counties pay somewhat higher salaries, they tend to contribute less toward an employee's dependent health insurance. The County used the Iowa counties of Marshall, Marion, Jasper, Warren, Webster and Boone to make comparisons. Marshall and Warren counties had settled with their employees for 3%, Warren for 4.9%. The County pointed out that Iowa is confronting difficult financial times with declining revenues and population. The County notes that last year the elected officials in Dallas county received a 2% wage increase and further, that they do not enjoy step increases as do these employees. Considering all of these factors, the County contends that its proposed 3.5% wage increase is the most reasonable position before the Arbitrator and should be awarded.

The **Union** proposes a 6% wage increase for these employees. The Union concedes that the state as a whole is having financial problems, however it points out that Dallas County is experiencing significant growth and economic development as the Des Moines metro population moves west to more rural areas along Interstate 80. With such growth comes an increased criminal caseload for these employees. The Union contends that these employees are underpaid in comparison to their counterparts in similar counties and that a 6% wage adjustment is justified by the data. The Compensation Board recommended and the Supervisors approved significant wage adjustments for the

elected officials: Auditor, Recorder, Treasurer, and County Attorney, 6%, Sheriff, 10%. Assistants in Black Hawk County start at \$36,050 and move through 14 steps to top pay of \$66,757.51. These wages will be adjusted by 3% July 1st, 2002. Woodbury County pays its Assistant County Attorneys \$37,500 (start) and a top wage at step 12 of \$60,546. These wages will increase by 3.5% July 1st. Clinton County starts its Assistant County Attorneys at from \$35,000-40,000 depending on experience. Jasper County Assistant County Attorneys start at \$56,685 depending on experience. Story County pays its Assistant County Attorneys without experience \$34,000 start. Muscatine County starts its Assistant County Attorneys at \$42,000.

DISCUSSION

The County's wage proposal is more in line with settlements among similar employees this bargaining year. Other Dallas County employees are receiving wage increases from 3-3.5%. In addition to any across the board wage increase, all but one of these employees will receive a step increase ranging from 3-7% significantly increasing his/her overall compensation over the life of the next contract. These employees enjoy a favorable group health insurance plan. They are required to contribute less than many other comparable employees. While the elected officials in this county will see their salaries increased by 6% (10% for Sheriff), last year they received a 2% increase. Further, the elected officials don't receive step increases. All of these factors lead me to conclude that the position of the County to increase these employees' wages by 3.5% is the most reasonable proposal before me. It is awarded.

AWARD

The County's position on wages is awarded. These employees should receive a 3.5% general wage increase effective July 1, 2002.

Signed this 4th day of June, 2002


Hugh J. Perry, Arbitrator

CERTIFICATE OF SERVICE

I certify that on the 4th day of June, 2002, I served the foregoing Award of Arbitrator upon each of the parties to this matter by mailing a copy to them at their respective addresses as shown below:

Renee Von Bokern
Von Bokern & Associates
2771 104 Street Suite H
Des Moines, Iowa 50322

Greg Lewis
AFSCME Council 61
4320 NW 2nd Avenue
Des Moines, Iowa 50313

I further certify that on the 4th day of June, 2002, I will submit this award for filing by mailing it to the Iowa Public Employment Relations Board, 514 East Locust Street, Suite 202, Des Moines, Iowa 50309.


Hugh J. Perry, Arbitrator